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The Christian's duty in
reference to the centennial year
by the
Rt. Rev. Wm. Bacon Stevens.

1876.



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THE CHRISTIAN'S DUTY

IN REFERENCE

TO THE CENTENNIAL YEAR.

BEING AN EXTRACT FROM THE

ANNUAL ADDRESS

OF

1815-1887.

RT. REV. WM. BACON STEVENS, D.D., LL.D.,

TO THE

CONVENTION OF THE DIOCESE OF PENNSYLVANIA,

MAY 17, 1876.

Published by order of the Convention.

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1876.

At a Meeting of the Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church, in the Diocese of Pennsylvania, held May 17th, 1876, it was

RESOLVED, *Nem. Con.*, That so much of the Bishop's Address as refers to the Centennial and the observance of the Lord's Day be requested for immediate publication.

JOHN A. CHILDS, *Secretary*.

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THE CHRISTIAN'S DUTY

IN REFERENCE TO

THE CENTENNIAL YEAR;

*Being an Extract from the Annual Address of the Rt. Rev.
Wm. Bacon Stevens, D.D., LL.D., to the Convention
of the Diocese of Pennsylvania, May 17, 1876.*

Meeting in the midst of this Centennial Year, and almost within the precincts of the great International Exhibition which marks that year, we cannot be indifferent to its presence and its influence. While, as a nation, we have the highest occasion for rendering thanks to Almighty God, for the long catalogue of national mercies by which this century has been distinguished; and while it is eminently proper that the occasion should be used for such an international exhibition, as shall show our own growth in all the material arts and agencies of civil and social life; yet we must not, as Christians, and especially as Christian ministers, shut our eyes to the very serious evils which necessarily accompany and follow, such an influx into our midst of nations and tongues and people from all quarters of the globe.

I feel, therefore, that it is incumbent on me, as Overseer of the Diocese in which this exhibition is held, and in which the Centennial anniversary of the nation's

birth is to be celebrated; to call the attention particularly of my brethren of the clergy, to the moral dangers which threaten us during this exciting year.

That this exhibition will foster that spirit of worldliness which even now is, alas, so prominent in the Church, cannot for a moment be doubted. The concentration of the public thought upon the scenes and events of the exhibition, will intensify the secularism of the day and fill to the brim, the heart and mind with earthly and material influences.

It is a hard struggle at all times to "set our affections on things above, not on things on the earth," to sit loose to the world, and to "walk by faith" "in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation;" how much more difficult will it be, when such objects of paramount excitement are ever present and are the theme of every tongue. Is there not danger, that in the rush of enthusiasm, and amidst the busy industries of sight-seeing and the attractions of a six months gala, that the religious life will be weakened and the hold of divine things on our minds be relaxed, and our faith lose its strength and the world regain much of its now lost ascendancy? Ought we not, therefore, most diligently to watch over our several flocks, and warn them from time to time against this in-rushing flood of worldliness, which gathers headway as it flows, and will, if unchecked, sweep away every vestige of holiness and faith? There is no necessary antagonism between such exhibitions, where the grandest products of human skill, and the proudest triumphs of the human mind are gathered together for the inspection and admiration of all men;—and the cultivation of true godliness. On the contrary, such exhibitions, viewed rightly and by

a devout spirit, rather enhance faith and love, as they lead the mind to adore Him who gave men such minds and endowed them with such powers; and thus through the visible and the material, are they brought into closer relation with the unseen and the spiritual. Yet such is the earthward proneness of the heart, that it readily yields to the slightest earthly tendencies; and when so many, and various influences will be brought to bear down upon, and crush out, individual piety, we shall fail of our duty, if we fail to lift up warning voices and do what in us lies, in the pulpit, in the chancel, in the pastoral visit, to cherish and keep alive that fire of devotion which should "ever be burning on the altar" of the heart.

We are in great danger, also, of losing our long cherished sanctity of the Lord's day. We cannot look upon the efforts made in our midst to break down the sacredness of the Lord's Day without the saddest forebodings. Thus far this country, and especially this city, has been eminently distinguished for its observance of Sunday. This recognition of God's law established in Eden, and of God's right to one day in seven to be used specially in his service, has been one of our greatest national blessings, and one of the great anchors which have kept us from drifting away from our fathers' God, the God who gave us this good land and this heritage of freedom. Now, however, we fear that the entering wedge is prepared, by which the enemies of God's law and God's day, will eventually split asunder the hitherto close union of that holy day with all that is dear and sacred to us as citizens and as Christians; robbing us of our civil and moral birthright to this day of rest, and trampling the Fourth Commandment

under the feet of the enemies alike of God's law, and of man's best interest.

The Lord's Day is interlinked with the holiest things of God—His Word, His worship, His Church, His Ministry, His Sacraments, His law, His kingdom on earth. The destruction of this day would be the destruction of each of these, so far as these have any bearing on man; for desecrate the day with which these things are specially associated, and the things themselves will soon become weak and worthless.

Even in a worldly point of view, no true student of history or thoughtful observer can fail to see that the reverent observance of the Lord's Day is indissolubly connected with our national character, greatness and perpetuity. A nation bereft of its Sunday would soon become debased in morals, infidel in religion, anarchical in government.

The remark made by an African Prince in England some years ago, that "he knew that the Bible was of God because he noticed that good men loved it and bad men hated it," is true of the Lord's Day also. Good men love it, and in proportion to the fervor of their love to God, is their delight in His Holy Day. Bad men hate it, and in proportion to their badness is their dislike of its sacredness and restraint. How evident is this when you put into two classes, the friends and the enemies of the Lord's Day, and mark out, who and what, they severally are.

Voltaire confessed that he despaired of overthrowing Christianity so long as the Sabbath stood in his way; and what a nation will become when this Lord's Day is set aside, you will find recorded in the history of that French Revolution, when a harlot was en-

throned as the Goddess of Reason, and when death was declared to be an eternal sleep. And here let me quote the words of Count Montalembert in his report to the French Parliament shortly after the overthrow of the French Republic, in which he thus pleads for the full restoration of the Sabbath: "In all our towns and throughout a too large portion of our country districts, the Sabbath's rest is violated and the worship, which was the consequence and condition of this rest, is abandoned. At the same time the soul is deprived of its nourishment and the body of its repose. *The poor man, the working man, are delivered up, unprotected to the every-day increasing influence of error and evil. Thus the profanation of the day has become the ruin of the moral and physical health of the people, at the same time that it is the ruin of the family, and of religious liberty.*"

Brethren, I cannot stop here to argue this question, but I call upon each clergyman in this Diocese to stand unflinchingly on this Holy Day and defend it as an institution of God; as an institution of our Holy Catholic Church; as an institution on which depends our very life and liberty as a Christian nation.

Never in our history were warning voices more needed than now, to tell the people of the threatened danger, and to teach them the true laws of reverence for Divine institutions; and that the very existence of the Christian religion in this country, stands or falls with the keeping, or the not keeping, the Fourth Commandment.

Another danger which I fear is the neglect of the means of Grace. Owing to the fact that every one of our family circles will be swelled by the presence of

visitors to the exhibition, many of whom will come from foreign lands, bringing with them thoughts and practices alien to our own, there will result a danger of relaxing our strong hold on the importance of Church-going, and there will be a temptation to yield to influences around us, and give up too much the services of the Sanctuary and the ordinances of Grace.

Each Christian needs carefully to watch over himself, and seek Divine strength and grace to withstand all such temptation, and to be vigorous and vigilant in the cause of Christ. The times especially demand that to our faith, that profession which we have already made in baptism, ratified in confirmation, and sealed in the Holy Communion, we should add Virtue—that manly courage, that high-toned sense of Christian honour, that noble resolve to be truly loyal to our dear Lord, that boldness in defense of truth, all which is included in that one word, Virtue. We may do much for Christ by this steadfastness in the faith, and we may, by a fickle and temporizing course, wound him seriously in the House of His friends.

In specifying these dangers, incident to the circumstances which surround us, I have called your attention to only a few, others will come to your own minds, but these I have pointed out, because you, my brethren, may do much by your faithful and judicious labors to ward them off or weaken their force.

It is especially desirable that all our Churches should be kept open with full services every Sunday. That each Vestry should detail members of its own body or other suitable persons to meet strangers at the Church doors, and conduct them to eligible seats. That there should be put up, on some part of the Church building,

neat tablets, with the name of the Church, its Rector, and its hours of service. That monthly committees should be appointed in each parish, which should take turns in looking out for strangers, especially those of our own household of faith, and secure, if possible their attendance on our services. That broad sheets, containing the names, and locations, and Rectors of our principal Churches, with the hours of worship, and a cordial invitation to be present, be placed in the leading hotels, and in such places within the Exhibition Grounds, as may be best suited to arrest the attention of the English-speaking visitors. That efforts be made to bring our Christian Brethren from other countries into our Sunday Schools, that they may see the practical working of these schools, and the buildings set apart for them. In fine, let us regard this Exhibition as a Providential call upon us collectively, as Parishes, and individually, as Christians, to do all the good we can in the wonderful opportunity which it opens before us. We must ever seek to do good and to get good, for we have much to learn as well as much to teach, and a diligent use of these few months, when we are permitted to sow the Divine seed beside all waters, will, in the end, bring forth fruit to the welfare of man and the glory of God.



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